

THE WEEK.

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BRITISH POLITICS AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS.

THE debate on the Address is dragging its interminable dulness from night to night, and illustrating the tendency, in this oratoric age, of all deliberation and council to be drowned in a sea of talk. As Mr. Gladstone has gone off to Bavaria, it is evident that nothing serious is at present contemplated by the Opposition. But Messrs Gladstone and Parnell have evidently taken their line. I couple their names thus closely together, because Mr. Gladstone now accepts the name of Nationalist, and no longer shrinks from open identification with the designs of the men whom the other day he was locking up as conspirators, and describing as marching through rapine to the dismemberment and disintegration of the Empire. Being defeated on the question of Home Rule, they are going to kindle a revolt against the payment of the judicial rents under the Land Act, in the hope that they will thereby render the government of Ireland impossible, and thus force the nation to bow its head to dismemberment. If Mr. Gladstone's language is more tortuous and unctuous than that of Mr. Parnell, it is not less clear. When it is considered that the Land Act was Mr. Gladstone's own measure, and that the judicial rents which he now incites the people to withhold represent a settlement to which he most solemnly pledged his own faith and that of the nation, we have a picture of Christian statesmanship on which it is needless to dilate. Sir John Paul, of the famous firm of Paul, Strachan, and Co., was a highly religious man; perhaps he did not read the lessons in church, or write theological essays, but he was the lay head of a religious party, and was prominent at missionary meetings and in all pious exercises. When the firm became fraudulent bankrupts, and was found to have made away with the securities of its customers, a gentleman who had banked with it, and was supposed to have a large deposit, was consoled with by a friend on the catastrophe. "Your condolences are misplaced," was his reply. "It is true that I used to bank there, and was a large depositor; but a few months ago I happened to call at the bank, and Sir John Paul talked to me in so religious a strain that I at once transferred my account." I hope it is not very impious to wish that for the welfare and honour of England, she may never again have a political leader who reads the lessons in church. A practical belief in God, and in the constant presence of the All-seeing Eye is, as I hold, the best security for rectitude, as well in statesmanship as in the other walks of life; but there is something else which goes by the name of religion and which too evidently consecrates selfish aims and perverts the moral sense. This man fancies (and, to do him justice, is assured by the flatterers who surround him) that he has a sort of divine mission which warrants him in inciting to public robbery in order that he, the chosen instrument of Heaven, may be restored to power. It is noticed that when anybody is replying to Mr. Gladstone, he leaves the House; and it is believed that adverse criticism is diligently kept out of his sight; so that his faith in his own perfection, and in the lawfulness of all means which lead to his aggrandizement, is likely to remain undisturbed.

THERE can be no doubt that a renewed agitation against the payment of rents in Ireland would be very difficult to deal with, especially when the

Government is so weak: and there is no saying to what other parts of the kingdom, or to what other descriptions of debts and contracts, the movement of repudiation might spread. The seed of discord, sown by Mr. Gladstone's beneficent hand among the different members of the United Kingdom, is beginning to spring up and bear its malignant fruit. We have now a Welsh and Scotch as well as an Irish movement of disruption under the name of Home Rule; and the same spirit is beginning to manifest itself in India, to which the principles promulgated by Mr. Gladstone apply with infinitely greater force than to Ireland. Though, by a desperate effort, Unionism has triumphed for the present, heavy clouds still hang over the destiny of this country, and I confess that, in my prognostications of her future, hope does not prevail.

THAT Lord Hartington and his friends did not join the Government, grasp power, and try to control events, still seems to me a thing profoundly to be deplored. Every one in private acknowledges the calamitous weakness of the present Government. Lord Randolph Churchill, as leader of the House of Commons, has managed so far to keep clear of palpable folly or indecency; and when he does, people are so relieved that they are ready to bestow upon him the praise of statesmanship. He has cleverness enough to mimic moderation and gravity for a time, and the nervousness of a debutant in leadership for the moment subdues his impudence. But there is in him neither wisdom nor honour, and the first time that a severe stress is laid either upon his statesmanship or his integrity, his real nature will appear. The man is in character and tone thoroughly, and I suspect incurably, low. He has won his position almost avowedly by means from which honour would recoil, and his unmerited elevation is at once a proof of Lord Salisbury's weakness, and an addition, little needed, to the influences which are sapping the integrity of British public life. He is now observed to be cultivating with laughable assiduity the impassiveness of countenance which characterized Lord Beaconsfield. To mimic Lord Beaconsfield's manner is easy; to adopt his political morality, unfortunately is still more so; in other respects the imitation, however servile, is not likely to be successful. We have too good reason to know that the fruits of the recent victory of Unionism are not for a moment safe in Lord Randolph's hands. He would not hesitate to barter them to-morrow, as he did the Crimes Act and the integrity of public justice in Ireland, for Parnellite support, if that support seemed essential to the purposes of what is styled his ambition. He is believed by Unionists to be opposed to the return of Mr. Goschen to the House of Commons; and certain it is that he deems nothing so "scrofulous," to use his own patrician phrase, as an alliance with moderation, and that he would feel himself much more at home in plotting with Mr. Parnell than in listening to the honourable counsels of Lord Hartington. Mr. Matthews, the new Home Secretary, and Lord Randolph's special nominee and supporter, is almost as much mistrusted as Lord Randolph himself, and his record on the Irish Question, which his critics have not failed to produce, is as far from reassuring as possible. Lord Salisbury means right. His conduct in offering to waive his own claims, and to act under Lord Hartington, is worthy of all praise. He has now taken a firmer stand on the Irish Question than he did when he was last in office. But whether he has power to control the bad elements in his own Cabinet is a question the practical answer to which is awaited with much anxiety by the friends of the Union.

I HAVE said from the beginning that Lord Hartington's plan of proping and regulating a Government without joining it was too artificial to be carried out, and that the relations between his following and that of the Government, especially in the elections, would soon become desperately difficult of adjustment. At King's Lynn the more patriotic of the Conservatives wished to bring forward Mr. Goschen as a Unionist, but Lord Claud Hamilton, as the representative of partisan Toryism, protested that the compact between Conservatives and Liberal Unionists was at an end, and urged the nomination of a strict party man. If the compact is at an end in elections, it is at an end everywhere, and Lord Hartington will soon find it impossible to restrain his followers, either in the House or in the country, from falling back into the mass of the Liberal party, and practically accepting again the leadership of Mr. Gladstone. As soon as this happens, the Tory Government, not having a majority of its own, must fall. It is not to Toryism, but to Union patriotism and moderation, that good citizens, and the commercial classes especially, have rallied. There